

Tajikistan received a downward trend arrow due to constant abuse of opposition parties at the local level in the run-up to parliamentary elections, the designation of the political reform and opposition movement Group 24 as an extremist entity in October, and the arrest and temporary detention of academic researcher Alexander Sodiqov on treason charges.

Throughout 2014, the government continued to arbitrarily limit free speech, access to information, and the right to civic organization. It led a campaign against the country's largest opposition group, the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), ahead of parliamentary elections planned for February 2015.

In May 2014, protests against police violence spiraled into clashes in Khorog, the capital of the autonomous Gorno-Badakhshan region, leading to the deaths of several protesters and at least one bystander. In June, state security services arrested Alexander Sodiqov, a Tajik citizen and PhD student at the University of Toronto who was conducting research about peacebuilding in Khorog. The government declared the Moscow-based Group 24, led by Tajik oppositionists in exile, an "extremist organization" in October for encouraging peaceful protests in Dushanbe, making participants in the group or its activities subject to prosecution under the same statutes covering terrorist organizations.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 7 / 40 (-1) [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12

Tajikistan's 1994 constitution provides for a strong, directly elected president who enjoys broad authority to appoint and dismiss officials. In the 63-seat Assembly of Representatives (lower chamber), members are elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms. In the 33-seat National Assembly (upper chamber), 25 members are chosen by local assemblies, and 8 are appointed by the president, all for five-year terms.

In 1992, Emomali Rahmon, a senior member of the Communist Party during Tajikistan's last years as part the Soviet Union, was installed as president in the midst of a civil war that lasted from 1992 to 1997. Rahmon was elected to office in 1994 and has been in power since. In 2013, Rahmon was reelected to a fourth term with 83.6 percent of the vote; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) observers noted that the election "lacked a real choice" and failed to meet international standards. The incumbent administration used its nearly absolute control over media coverage, an extremely high threshold for number of signatures required to run for office, and the exclusion of migrant workers—who comprise as much as 45 percent of the electorate—from the nomination process to cement its dominance over the electoral process.

Rahmon's People's Democratic Party (PDP) has consistently dominated legislative elections. The PDP won 55 of 63 lower house seats in 2010 parliamentary elections. OSCE monitors said those elections failed to meet basic democratic standards.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 3 / 16 (-1)

A 1999 referendum permitted the formation of religion-based political parties and paved the way for the legal operation of the Islamist opposition, including the IRPT. Opposition parties were promised 30 percent of senior government posts as part of the peace accords that ended the civil war in 1997, but this quota has not been met. The Islamic and secular opposition are frequently persecuted and increasingly alienated from the political process.

IRPT members were beaten, harassed, and imprisoned throughout 2014, with some reportedly tortured. In preparation for parliamentary elections in February 2015, the government used state-controlled media to malign the IRPT. In January 2014, state national television claimed a faith healer convicted of child rape in Isfara was an IRPT member, but records showed no such person belonging to the party; the member identification number shown in the broadcast belonged to someone else, and an “Islamic” beard had reportedly been digitally added to his picture. Beginning in March, videos purporting to show IRPT members engaged in sexual activities were broadcast on state-controlled television; party representatives denied affiliation with the individuals.

Local authorities increased harassment of IRPT district and regional offices throughout the year, raiding meetings, closing local offices, and using eminent domain claims to tear offices down. In some cases, authorities falsely informed members of the IRPT that the party had been outlawed at the national level. In April, unknown assailants attacked and beat Sayidumar Hasuayni, an IRPT parliamentarian and first deputy chief of the party, during a state visit to Khorog. In June, party leader Muhammad Kabiri was pelted with eggs and vegetables in Kulob district. In August, the IRPT’s chair from Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, Saodatsho Adolatov, was sentenced to five years in prison for “inciting hatred” and accused of having “trained with the Taliban,” though no evidence for this charge was presented.

In October, the Supreme Court declared exiled entrepreneur Umarli Quvvatov’s Moscow-based opposition movement Group 24 to be an “extremist organization”—the same legal designation applied to terrorist groups—in response to its plans to hold peaceful protests in Dushanbe.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

Corruption is pervasive. Patronage networks and regional affiliations are central to political life. Officials from the president’s native Kulob district are dominant in government. At least two of Rahmon’s children hold senior government posts, and various family members reportedly maintain extensive business interests in the country, including the largest bank, the railroad, and the national television channel, among many others. Major irregularities at the National Bank of Tajikistan and the country’s largest industrial company, TALCO Aluminum, have been documented and linked together. Tajikistan was ranked 152 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Civil Liberties: 15 / 60 (–1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16

Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and the press, independent journalists face harassment and intimidation. Tajikistan decriminalized libel in 2012, but the civil charge is often used to crippling effect against newspapers that criticize the government. The act of publicly insulting the president

remains punishable by up to five years in jail. In February 2014, a Dushanbe court ruled that Olga Tutubalina, an editor of the independent online news outlet Asia-Plus, must pay damages of \$6,000 to three plaintiffs who claimed they were libeled in an article criticizing the country's intelligentsia, even though none of them was named.

The government controls most printing presses, newsprint supplies, and broadcasting facilities. Most television stations are state owned or only nominally independent. The government blocks some critical websites and online news outlets and imposes mass blackouts on websites, social media platforms, email services, and even mobile messaging programs in order to prevent protests or criticism. In October, in response to attempts by Russia-based Tajik opposition groups to mobilize protests in Dushanbe, authorities blocked hundreds of websites and communications platforms throughout the country, reportedly including a full blackout on internet services in some areas.

The government imposes a number of restrictions on religious freedom. Religious activities are restricted to state-approved houses of prayer. Authorities limit the number of mosques that can function in towns and have undertaken a campaign in recent years to shutter those that lack proper registration. Throughout 2014, Tajikistan continued to prosecute citizens for alleged membership in extremist religious organizations. In September, Tajikistan's highest Muslim cleric issued an edict against criticizing the government, which oppositionists saw as a sign of political pressure on the religious hierarchy. A 2011 law banned minors from attending regular religious services in mosques and prohibited private religious education, limiting even private discussion of religious topics in the home; many religious leaders criticized the law or quietly refused to obey it. Wearing the hijab (headscarf) in schools and universities has been banned since 2005.

In June 2014, authorities arrested Tajik citizen and University of Toronto PhD student Alexander Sodikov, who was conducting research for a British academic project about peacebuilding in Khorog, and charged him with espionage and treason. The case sparked a global backlash from hundreds of universities and academic organizations that perceived it as an assault on academic freedom. After five weeks in custody, Sodikov was released and returned to Canada, though charges against him were not dropped.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12 (-1)

The government limits freedoms of assembly and association. Local government approval is required to hold public demonstrations, and officials reportedly refuse to grant permission in many cases and often interfere with the ability of journalists to report on demonstrations.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must register with the Ministry of Justice and are vulnerable to closure for minor technicalities. In November, the government discussed draft legislation that would require NGOs to register foreign and anonymous funding with the Ministry of Justice.

Citizens have the legal right to form and join trade unions and to bargain collectively, but unions are largely subservient to the authorities.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16

The judiciary lacks independence. Many judges are poorly trained and inexperienced, and bribery is reportedly widespread. Court proceedings rarely follow the rule of law, and nearly all defendants are found

guilty. Police frequently make arbitrary arrests and beat detainees to extract confessions. Overcrowding and disease contribute to often life-threatening conditions in prisons.

Discrimination against ethnic minorities is not a significant problem in Tajikistan. However, while same-sex sexual conduct is legal, there is no legal protection for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people against discrimination, and most hide their gender identity.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

Tajikistani citizens can travel freely but must apply for registration of their permanent residence with local authorities. The right to choose institutions of higher education is formally protected but has been plagued by widespread corruption, and students interested in studying Islamic theology are forbidden from attending schools outside the country without special permission from the state.

Scarcely employment has forced many to seek work abroad, and real choice in one's form of labor is inhibited by an anemic economy with little professional opportunity. Tajikistan ranks near the bottom in global surveys of economic freedom, reflecting a dysfunctional economic environment that impacts everything from peasant farms to large enterprises. By law, all land belongs to the state, which allocates use rights to citizens primarily for agricultural purposes in a process plagued by corruption and inefficiency. Tajikistan did streamline processes for starting a new business, paying taxes, and obtaining credit in 2014.

Sexual harassment, discrimination, and violence against women, including spousal abuse, are reportedly common, but cases are rarely investigated. Reports indicate that women sometimes face societal pressure to wear headscarves, though official policy discourages the practice. Despite some government efforts to address human trafficking, Tajikistan remains a source and transit country for persons trafficked for prostitution. Child labor, particularly on cotton farms, also remains a problem.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)